

TEACHERS

Bugging the Bargainers

The 86 unionized teachers were getting nowhere in contract negotiations with the school board of Carrollton, Mich., a blue-collar suburb of Saginaw. Some of the teachers expressed harsh opinions in the junior high school lounge that they used as a caucus room. When board negotiators repeated some of their conversations word for word during the contract talks, they could not believe it was a coincidence.

Two weeks ago, the teachers searched the lounge and found a bugging device hidden behind a heating duct; the wires led directly to the office of School Superintendent Charles Murphy. Two more bugs turned up in a washroom adjoining the lounge. Their wires ran through the speech correction room, then through a trap door to an earphone set locked in a filing cabinet in the office of Assistant Principal Gerald Rittersdorf.

Superintendent Murphy, who had come to the district 22 years ago as a principal, resigned immediately. The teachers demanded the firing of everybody connected with the bugging, and the embarrassed board started an investigation. Last week it reported its findings: Rittersdorf had planted the bugs on orders from Murphy. School Board President Steve Vlahon had learned of the bugs and ordered Murphy to remove them; Murphy had not done so.

Though Rittersdorf was suspended, the teachers are discussing possible legal action with their lawyers. Meantime, they hope that the incident will force the crestfallen board to come closer to meeting their salary demands. "It was like something out of *I Spy*," says one teacher. "But something good will come of this. The board will now have to listen to the teachers"—and presumably without bugs.